

Florin Japanese American Citizens League
Oral History Project

Oral History Interview

with

SHIGENO HOKA NISHIMI

September 22, 1992
Sacramento, California

By Marion Kanemoto

Florin Japanese-American Citizens League
and Oral History Program
California State University, Sacramento
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INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interviewer

Marion Kanemoto, retired school nurse and member of Oral History Project, Florin Japanese American Citizens League [JACL].

Sharon Adam, Mrs. Nishimi's daughter, joined the interview briefly.

Interview Time and Place

September 22, 1992
Home of Shigemi Hoka Nishimi
3925 First Avenue, Sacramento, California 95817

Translation

Lily Umeda, member of Florin JACL translated the interview taken in Japanese into English.

Kanemoto edited the translation.

Typing and Editing

Lillian Nakazato, retired high school counselor and science teacher and a member of the Florin JACL typed and edited the manuscript.

Photography

Dan Inouye reproduced the pictures from Nishimi's family album.

Tapes and Interview Records

Copies of the bound transcript and the tapes will be kept by the Florin Japanese American Citizen League and in the University Archives at The Library, California State University, Sacramento, 6000 J Street, Sacramento, California, 95819.

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Shigeno Hoka Nishimi is an issei woman born to Otomatsu and Risa Nitta Kanzaki on May 20, 1902, in Wakayama-ken, Japan. Her parents were farmers in Japan, and she was determined not to marry in the town of Tahara as she would be then destined to farm and knew she could not take the physical demand of farming.

Shigeno was the youngest of two brothers and one sister. She married Toshihiko Nishimi, a widower who had returned to Japan from Los Angeles on January 15, 1924 and who worked with Arts and Antiques in the Los Angeles area. They had four children: two sons, Kiyoshi and Dan, and two daughters, Yoshiko and Sharon.

During the World War II evacuation period the Nishimi family were sent to the Walerga Assembly Center and the Tule Lake Camp. There, Shigeno worked as a waitress and dishwasher and taught some basic flower arrangements in "ikebana" classes for free.

She is most known for her accomplishments and followers in the Ikenobo Ikebana Society. Her given flower name is Hoka. She had credentials to teach ikebana before World War II and continued to develop her skills with several trips to Kyoto, Japan. Her husband never discouraged her.

In January of 1946, the Nishimis left Tule Lake Camp for Sacramento where her husband's brother had settled. She continued teaching ikebana, and through the years she has certified several Ikenobo instructors in the Sacramento area. She is a modest "classy" lady who uses the most refined Japanese language to match her achievements in flower arrangement. She held classes for ten to forty students at a time and has touched thousands of students of all races and is highly respected and revered by her students.

She has worn a pacemaker for her weak heart for the past ten or more years and continues to live independently with the assistance of her daughter, Sharon. She shows a great consideration for others' time and efforts. Her husband, Toshihiko, passed away on August 10, 1990.

[Session: September 22, 1992]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

KANEMOTO: This is the interview of Shigeno Nishimi also known as Hoka Nishimi, her flower [arrangement master] name. She is an issei woman, 90 years old. The interview was taken at her residence at 3925 First Ave., Sacramento, California 95817, on September 22, 1992. The interviewer is Marion Kanemoto of the Oral History Project, Florin Japanese American Citizens League. Also present is Sharon Adams, daughter of Mrs. Nishimi.

KANEMOTO: Mrs. Nishimi, where were you born?

NISHIMI: In Japan.

KANEMOTO: Please tell me all about your birthplace.

NISHIMI: Wakayama-ken, Higashi-mura-gun.

KANEMOTO: Higashi?

NISHIMI: There are Higashi and Nishi.

KANEMOTO: Yes, Higashi-mura-gun, Tahara.

KANEMOTO: What did your father do for a living, his occupation?

NISHIMI: My father bought a small boat and did fishing and helped farmers. That was his work. That is all he did.

KANEMOTO: Your mother?

NISHIMI: My mother farmed all by herself.

KANEMOTO: Your brother and sisters?

NISHIMI: I had three--two boys died early of beriberi.

KANEMOTO: "Katke" is beriberi.

NISHIMI: Elder sister lived in good health; she died when she was eighty-three.

KANEMOTO: Then the first son was Yoshitaro?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: And the next one?

NISHIMI: Tomokazu.

KANEMOTO: Tomokazu. When did Yoshitaro die?

NISHIMI: When he was fifteen years old.

KANEMOTO: Fifteen years old? A teen.

KANEMOTO: Yoshitaro.

ADAMS: I thought. . . .

KANEMOTO: How old was Tomokazu?

NISHIMI: Twenty-nine years old.

ADAMS: No, mama, he was seventeen years old when he died.

NISHIMI: OK.

KANEMOTO: Did Tomokazu go to Canada?

NISHIMI: Tomokazu did not come to America; Yoshitaro went to Canada.

KANEMOTO: To Canada.

ADAMS: He died when he was seventeen.

KANEMOTO: Seventeen? He was a teenager then. He was in Canada when he was young.

NISHIMI: Yes. That was when the government (Japan) was urging people to emigrate. Everyone came, so at that time he came.

KANEMOTO: Oh, I see.

KANEMOTO: Then Tomokazu did not come to America. Mrs. Nishimi, you were the youngest of all?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: You must be lonely, you are the only one left now.

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Would you tell me a little about yourself when you were a child, memories of happy times.

NISHIMI: Yes. A friend gave us some home-made imo-mochi. She said, it was delicious and gave it to us. This got sticky on my hands. I didn't know what to do. Mother didn't come home until late so I cried. I still remember that.

KANEMOTO: Sticky mochi, oh I see.

NISHIMI: You slice potatoes in thin slices and make it into a powder. Mix this powder with mochi-gome (sweet rice) and steam it.

KANEMOTO: I see, it must be sticky.

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Then, when you were a child, you had a happy childhood?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Please mention something about your schooling in order again.

NISHIMI: After I finished primary and advanced school, sewing was most important.

KANEMOTO: Oh, you liked sewing?

NISHIMI: Yes, sewing was important, schooling was sort of extra.

KANEMOTO: Was it after ninth grade?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: OK. Was it a special school?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Was it for Japanese or dressmaking?

NISHIMI: There were no sewing machines long time ago so we had to hand sew and made Hinagata size, samples were made.

KANEMOTO: What is Hinagata?

NISHIMI: It was one-fourth the regular size, shirt or dress.

KANEMOTO: Is it like a quilt?

ADAMS: No, no, I think she is saying that when they made samples, everything was in miniature size because they had to sew it by hand.

KANEMOTO: Oh, I see. For practice.

NISHIMI: For practice.

KANEMOTO: Small sized samples. Was it because you didn't have enough material?

NISHIMI. No, no. We didn't have sewing machines.

KANEMOTO: There was no sewing machine so then it was for practice. You don't hear that kind of story in America.

ADAMS: That was in Japanese school.

NISHIMI: We did have enough material (yardage) but we didn't have sewing machines. We had to sew by hand. Even by hand it looked like machine sewn.

KANEMOTO: It is the first time, I ever heard of that kind of explanation. Was it a yofuku [Western dress] or was it a kimono?

NISHIMI: Yofuku [includes dress and suit]. Kimonos were different. Kimono was san-mai-gasame (three sets of kimonos worn at the same time).

KANEMOTO: Oh, I see.

NISHIMI: I was asked to make a kimono for my teacher so I did. After that I became ill with the flu and was sick for three months. It was really terrible. Many people caught this. That was a very bad kind.

KANEMOTO: You had pneumonia?

NISHIMI: No, it didn't become pneumonia. Mother dug for earthworms and made medicine for me.

KANEMOTO: Oh, what was that?

NISHIMI: Earthworms. She boiled them.

NISHIMI: Yes. Earthworms that are in the earth.

KANEMOTO: Uh huh.

NISHIMI: That will take away the bad fever.

KANEMOTO: You boiled it?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: When you put earthworms in boiling water, the water turns yellow. You add orange juice to it to disguise it, and then I was forced to drink it. [Laughter]

KANEMOTO: Was it taken as a medicine?

NISHIMI: Yes. That was a very bad flu. There were many people who got pneumonia and died. Because of the earthworm, I was saved.

KANEMOTO: Oh. You believed in it!

NISHIMI: Yes. In 1918 there was a bad influenza here. Chinese dry earthworms and sell it.

KANEMOTO: Earthworms?

NISHIMI: Yes. If you are on the farm, you could make it yourself.

KANEMOTO: Who made that medicine for you?

NISHIMI: This has been done from long ago.

ADAMS: Your mother made it for you.

NISHIMI: Yes. The medicine was boiled by my mother.

KANEMOTO: So she must have dug for your earthworms.

NISHIMI: Yes. When you boil the earthworms, the water turns yellow. Then you strain it to get rid of the sand. Then you mix it with orange juice.

KANEMOTO: To add taste. Because of that you got well.

NISHIMI: Yes.

ADAMS: [Laughter]

KANEMOTO: Was it about 1918?

NISHIMI: Yeah. It was terrible.

KANEMOTO: Oh. Flu was bad then.

NISHIMI: At that time I learned what a backache was for the first time.

KANEMOTO: You were still young.

NISHIMI: Yes. I was young. Towards evening my back would hurt and my head ached so I crawled into bed. I still remember.

KANEMOTO: OK. You talked about the pine tree a while ago, would you please repeat that story again about the scenic environment near your house. The big pine tree.

NISHIMI: There was a rock and on that rock a huge pine tree spread branches out towards the river. It had took four to five persons to go around the

trunk. That tree was eaten up by pine-eating insects.

KANEMOTO: What pine-eating bug?

ADAMS: I think it is called pine beetle.

KANEMOTO: Pine beetle. That must have been a real old tree.

NISHIMI: Yeah. That is true. The pine trees were still young and small all over Japan.

KANEMOTO: Yes, yes, pine trees take a long time to grow. Even if you were to go back home to Japan you would miss that tree, a landmark.

NISHIMI: Yes. Your memories. There is nothing there now.

KANEMOTO: Right now, there are no other trees?

NISHIMI: There is nothing there now.

KANEMOTO: Right now, there are no other trees?

NISHIMI: There is no more beautiful scenery. If you walked under that tree, there were sandy beaches and people swimming, but now there are no more pine trees so now it is a bleak landscape.

KANEMOTO: When you were a child, did you go swimming?

NISHIMI: Yes, we went. For children attending school, swimming was a requirement-- for women, too.

KANEMOTO: Oh, women swam for exercise?

NISHIMI: Yeah.

KANEMOTO: Oh. This becomes an extra story.

NISHIMI: Yeah [laughter].

[Inadvertently hit the red button here and erased a bit of tape.]

KANEMOTO: What did they wear?

NISHIMI: There were no bathing suits at that time so ladies made shirts and pants with bleached cotton material. At that time one girl who was swimming that had her period so it got red.

KANEMOTO: [Laughter] [Adams also laughing]

NISHIMI: During school vacation, we wanted to swim all day. We were told not to swim all day, but by the time we got home, our lips were purple. All day long. The salty wind. . . . [Laughing so hard, couldn't catch the words.] They sat in the sand and dried their backs in the sun and played all day. So, by that time their lips were purple.

KANEMOTO: You must have gotten punished when you got home.

NISHIMI: "Don't stay too long", I was warned. I didn't, but in the evening when I came home one could tell by looking at the lips. [Laughter]

KANEMOTO: Even in those days, kids disobeyed. Was it during the time that you should have been attending school?

NISHIMI: No, No. It was summer vacation.

KANEMOTO: OK. Vacation, I see. At that time you were young. Were you supposed to help with the farming?

NISHIMI: I couldn't help with the farming.

KANEMOTO: Oh, you didn't have to help?

ADAMS: She couldn't tolerate it.

NISHIMI: After I got engaged to Nishimi, his mother told me right away to come and help her on the farm. Planting rice required extra help. That was easy so I was able to help. Then I was told to pound the wheat. In the hot sun, the wheat had to be dried on high racks. Then with a long bamboo pole we pounded the wheat to separate the wheat from the straw.

KANEMOTO: Yes. I saw that while I was in Japan.

NISHIMI: I was told to do that.

KANEMOTO: Hard work wasn't it.

NISHIMI: I did not help with that.

KANEMOTO: Ah, yes.

ADAMS: She was kind of a feminist because she said, "If that is what you want me to do, I am not going to marry your son."

[Laughing]

NISHIMI: Another job I was expected to do was to make bedding covers with cotton material that was woven on a loom--a tough, strong material that lasts many years. I was told to sew this hard bedding cover. My mother-in-law made me do it.

KANEMOTO: Oh, you got a scolding from Nishimi?

NISHIMI: Yeah.

KANEMOTO: When and at what age did you promise to marry Mr. Nishimi?

NISHIMI: When I was twenty-one. Oh, I got married at twenty-two.

KANEMOTO: You got married. Was Mr. Nishimi a widower? Mr. Nishimi lost his first wife to illness?

NISHIMI: Yeah.

KANEMOTO: She died after one year, then Mr. Nishimi went back to Japan. That was the time this marriage proposal began?

NISHIMI: Yeah.

KANEMOTO: Oh. that is too bad.

NISHIMI: The first Mrs. Nishimi died of meningitis here in California and he took her ashes back.

ADAMS: What is interesting to me is that she finally agreed to marry him after she turned down all those other proposals. KANEMOTO:

Because she heard he was a good, religious man. Well, she did not want to live in Tahara?

ADAMS: That is when her future mother-in-law was becoming a problem.

KANEMOTO: Mrs. Nishimi, while you were young did you want to come to America?

NISHIMI: It's not that I wanted to come to America but that if I stayed at Tahara I would have had to become a farmer and that's too hard for me. I didn't want to become a farmer so that is why I came to America.

ADAMS: She even turned down marriage proposals from doctors. She didn't want to stay in the rural community.

KANEMOTO: She is smart.

NISHIMI: [Laughing]

KANEMOTO: Mr. Nishimi must have cared for you.

NISHIMI: Uh huh.

KANEMOTO: It must have been before World War II that you were all in the Los Angeles area?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Please tell us about the past. What kind of work did Mr. Nishimi do?

NISHIMI: At first he was in charge of packaging at Soji Bijitsu Shokai [Soji Fine Arts Company].

KANEMOTO: Oh, I see. He must have been handling antique objects.

NISHIMI: Yeah. He managed antique objects. He was responsible in looking over the antique wares and in ordering whatever was needed.

KANEMOTO: What was the owner's name?

NISHIMI: Soji. In the beginning he had a partnership with Mr. Kariya. Mr. Kariya died suddenly of a heart attack. After that Mr. Soji took over.

KANEMOTO: O.K. Then, did you work at a pharmacy? Was it in Los Angeles?

NISHIMI: That was after I graduated from school.

KANEMOTO: Was it in Japan?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Oh, in Japan, then you were working?

NISHIMI: Yeah. I worked for four years before getting married.

KANEMOTO: Oh, yes, you graduated and did some sewing and then worked at a pharmacy.

NISHIMI: Yes,

KANEMOTO: Then you had some experiences.

NISHIMI: At that time a doctor praised me for my good work there [laughing]. It took most people three years to learn.

KANEMOTO: Uh huh but you learned in one year. Oh, you were helpful. That is interesting. It is less hard work than farming!

NISHIMI: Yes, less work. [Both laughing]

KANEMOTO: O.K. It makes sense.

ADAMS: Then after Kiyoshi and Yoshiko were born, didn't you start work at the store?

NISHIMI: Yes, it was that way.

KANEMOTO: What year did you come to America?

NISHIMI: 1924.

KANEMOTO: 1924, then that was just before the alien law changed.

ADAMS: She just made it.

KANEMOTO: Oh, then did you know the law was going to change?

NISHIMI: Oh, I heard there was talk about such a law, but I had already planned to come.

KANEMOTO: So you hurried here. To what part of Los Angeles?

NISHIMI: North San Pedro.

KANEMOTO: North San Pedro, then it must be the downtown area.

NISHIMI: Uh huh. There was the United Church, a Christian church.

KANEMOTO: Oh, it is not there now?

NISHIMI: The church is not there now.

ADAMS: It is a parking lot. My father had store receipts from that time. She still has them.

KANEMOTO: Oh, hang on to it.

ADAMS: [laughing]

KANEMOTO: O.K. then, when you came to Los Angeles, were you lonely?

NISHIMI: I was not lonely.

KANEMOTO: There were many Japanese nearby so you had no problem.

NISHIMI: One block away from our house a woman, I knew in Japan lived there. She came earlier and she lived near us.

This person was very sharp even though I couldn't speak English she used English with Japanese. I could speak to her in Japanese. I was depending on her. There was a vacant lot, a weedy lot, between our houses. When I walked over this vacant lot, it was her place. Children crawled through this weedy patch and went to her place. This woman was very sharp, spoke English and Japanese.

KANEMOTO: Uh huh, mixed the languages.

NISHIMI: This person had a framed picture of the Emperor hanging in her living room. When a Caucasian came to visit and said, "This person is the same as the president of the United State." She talked in Japanese. She didn't know the power of an Emperor [talking while laughing].

KANEMOTO: Yes. For the people from Japan the emperor was very important; they had respect for him.

NISHIMI: One young boy came to our house. He had a newspaper and stretched out his arm with opened palm. I couldn't understand if he wanted money or what? Did this person want us to subscribe to the newspaper? Nishimi's brother was subscribing to an English newspaper. He figured I couldn't understand English so he came to the doorway and threw it down. Then he extended his hand again. Oh, I thought he wanted me to pay for it. I told him I didn't know until brother [in-law] came home so I told him, "Next time."

KANEMOTO: Did that explanation help out? Was it for a tip or was it for the payment for the newspaper?

NISHIMI: It was for the newspaper.

KANEMOTO: Oh. It wasn't for the tip

NISHIMI: No. I didn't have any money to pay for the newspaper.

KANEMOTO: When you can't understand, it is not easy to communicate. Funny things do happen.

NISHIMI: Yeah.

KANEMOTO: OK. At that let's see--on the boat did you go straight to Los Angeles?

NISHIMI: No, we went to San Francisco and reached there on March twentieth.

KANEMOTO: 1924.

NISHIMI: Then I heard there was going to be a stool inspection and whoever could pass, could land.

KANEMOTO: Oh, stool inspection! This story I have heard from other sources, but you have a good memory.

NISHIMI: I was worried if I could pass the exam. If I didn't I would have to stay. They served Chinese rice. I am not used to that rice so I didn't want to eat it.

ADAMS: [Laughing]

NISHIMI: If I didn't pass, I would be in trouble but luckily I passed the inspection and got out of there. They were looking for parasites. There were many Chinese who didn't pass. They were used to failures so they were noisy and played around.

KANEMOTO: Oh, I see. I talked to many isseis but only you remember the details.

ADAMS: Was it at Angel Island where you went and were detained but the barrack was not there.

KANEMOTO: How many days did you stay on Angel Island?

NISHIMI: That was only one night. Beneath our beds we could see ocean waves.

KANEMOTO: Oh. Okay.

NISHIMI: After that the fire destroyed that house.

KANEMOTO: Is that so. That's why children's housing was not there. She really remembers well, very vividly. That is wonderful.

NISHIMI: Mr. Senda and his son were with me when we came on the same ship. This boy who was Mr. Senda's son, I don't think was two years old yet. Miraculously, when isseis had their pictures taken by TV, this man Senda introduced himself as Senda. I remembered Mr. Senda was with us when we came to America. I mentioned this to him. I remembered Mr. Senda. He said I was that one. At that time he was a little boy.

KANEMOTO: Oh. Time flies. . . .

NISHIMI: Japanese prisoners of war, during World War II, 500 Japanese prisoners of war were confined at that place (Angel Island). That's why on the

walls of that building, they used knives and carved on the walls.

KANEMOTO: Carved scribbling.

NISHIMI: Yes. "Rakugaki". (graffiti)

KANEMOTO: Oh! Is it still there?

NISHIMI: The fire destroyed that building so it is no longer there.

KANEMOTO: Oh, I see. You went to see it in later years?

NISHIMI: We went "sight-seeing."

KANEMOTO: Oh. You went sight-seeing.

NISHIMI: Yes. We went sight-seeing, but I didn't have a chance.

KANEMOTO: It is worth seeing. Angel Island is a historical site now.

ADAMS: I haven't seen it either.

KANEMOTO: Did you get seasick on the ship when you were on the Pacific Ocean?

NISHIMI: Yes, I did get seasick.

KANEMOTO: Oh! You did.

NISHIMI: If I go to visit Japan, I wonder if I would have to go through this kind of seasickness.

KANEMOTO: Uh huh. Well, then let's continue. When you came to Los Angeles you had your children? Did you work?

NISHIMI: Yeah, right away. I didn't work.

KANEMOTO: How many children?

NISHIMI: Four.

KANEMOTO: Their names?

NISHIMI: Kiyoshi, Yoshiko, Yasuko and Dan.

KANEMOTO: Name of this lady? [pointing to Sharon]

NISHIMI: Sharon, that is her English name.

KANEMOTO: Yasuko Sharon. Did you give English names right after they were born?

NISHIMI: No, it was later.

KANEMOTO: Later, okay. Then others were later too?

NISHIMI: Yes, later.

KANEMOTO: Isseis, most of them, gave Japanese names.

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Your husband's pay. How much was his pay?

You were happy because he got raises.

NISHIMI: That was \$150.

KANEMOTO: What year was it? 19 . . .

NISHIMI: I came in 1924.

KANEMOTO: At that time \$150. So you were happy.

NISHIMI: After the raise he was getting \$175.

KANEMOTO: \$175, wasn't that a good wage for that time?

NISHIMI: He had a job continuously so he was never idle.

KANEMOTO: Yes. Then did you have hardship during the depression? Do you remember?

NISHIMI: Yes, that was just when we started the store. He went to the countryside to get orders. Got orders together and then did the deliveries. I helped at the store then. That's what I did. We rechecked, then back to the countryside to deliver goods.

KANEMOTO: Then, that was when the market crashed.

NISHIMI: Yes, at that time we had very hard times. We couldn't get back the money we loaned. We had to pay what we owed.

[End of Tape 1; Side A, Side 2 is empty.]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

KANEMOTO: What year was that earthquake?

NISHIMI: The year we had the earthquake was when the children were. . . .

KANEMOTO: Was it the year of the depression?

NISHIMI: Yes, probably about 1930.

KANEMOTO: Oh, you remember because it was the depression year.

NISHIMI: Like this [gesturing] the earthquake.

KANEMOTO: Especially in Los Angeles.

NISHIMI: Long Beach was the quake center.

KANEMOTO: You didn't have any problems?

NISHIMI: The canned foods fell off the shelves but no one was hurt.

KANEMOTO: Then the depression eventually ended. Mr.

Nishimi worked
and the children went to school. Did the family live without problems until World War II?

NISHIMI: The children studied and went to school working while they attended school. They graduated from universities on their own.

KANEMOTO: The children went to school on their own?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Okay. When World War II started were they attending universities or was it later?

NISHIMI: It was then.

KANEMOTO: They were in between?

NISHIMI: Yes. At that time the children were thinking of going into higher education.

KANEMOTO: Yes, we really were uneasy at that time weren't we? Did anyone get drafted?

NISHIMI: For the army?

KANEMOTO: Uh huh.

NISHIMI: They received draft notices.

KANEMOTO: Did Kiyoshi and Dan? Did they go into the service?

NISHIMI: They didn't have to go into the army.

KANEMOTO: Oh, no one went.

NISHIMI: No. They were drafted but they were already married so they had their training at home.

KANEMOTO: Was this Kiyoshi?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Then he didn't have to go to war?

NISHIMI: No.

KANEMOTO: Dan didn't go at all?

NISHIMI: No. He went to the Vietnam War.

KANEMOTO: Then did he come home without injury and safely?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Did you worry a lot?

NISHIMI: Yes, I did worry.

KANEMOTO: At that time everyone had problems. Then before you went into camp you lived pretty much the American way but you didn't have any inconveniences.

NISHIMI: No, we didn't have any inconveniences. During the time of depression I heard there were people looking in garbages.

KANEMOTO: They were hungry. Uh huh. Looking into and taking food from someone else's garbage cans. When you were lonely in America, you must have missed your parents and your brothers and sister. When you were lonely you must have looked up your

friends. Was it one of those Kenjin-kai [a social club of people from the same prefecture in Japan]?

NISHIMI: Yes. I did join the Kenjin-kai and the people I got to know at the store. We had picnics together.

KANEMOTO: Then you were not lonely. You were not alone.

NISHIMI: No.

KANEMOTO: When you had the children that must have kept you busy.

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Did you attend church? What kind of church?

NISHIMI: That was Buddhist, but it was Koyasan.

KANEMOTO: Koyasan.

NISHIMI: That Koyasan was on Jackson Street. [actually, Jackson Road.]

KANEMOTO: Before the war, did you make friends with Caucasians?

NISHIMI: No, I couldn't become friends with Caucasians.

KANEMOTO: Was the reason the Japanese goods store?

NISHIMI: However, there were Caucasians who came to our store who spoke Japanese.

KANEMOTO: Those people knew elaborate Japanese art objects.

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Did you feel any discrimination?

NISHIMI: No, I didn't feel any at all.

KANEMOTO: Not at all.

NISHIMI: When we came back (after World War II), the owner of the store on Third Street said he would not sell to Japanese.

KANEMOTO: Oh, you heard about it?

NISHIMI: Yes, that is all I heard.

KANEMOTO: Before that you didn't have the urge to go back to Japan?

NISHIMI: No.

KANEMOTO: You didn't want to farm. Were you teaching flower arrangement then?

NISHIMI: I started flower arrangement when Sharon was two years old.

KANEMOTO: Okay.

NISHIMI: After I started and all these years I did not stop teaching.

KANEMOTO: Then you must have started to teach before you went to camp.

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: What was your teacher's name? Do you remember?

NISHIMI: Senka Okamoto.

KANEMOTO: Senka Okamoto. This must be the Ikenobo style.

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: At that time was flower arrangement in demand?

NISHIMI: No, not that much but it was becoming popular.

KANEMOTO: You were able to teach calligraphy and sewing but why did you choose flower arrangement? Was it because you had some good reason? Was it of your mother's or grandmother's influence?

NISHIMI: My first daughter was taking calligraphy. Her teacher recommended that Yoshiko keep taking the lessons. If she continued, she would be successful in that area since she had good hand strokes.

KANEMOTO: Uh huh.

NISHIMI: After she got married she had to quit. If you did flower arrangement you could decorate the house.

KANEMOTO: You had to collect utensils for the arrangements, did you have a difficult time?

NISHIMI: No. I had no problems with those things. In order to arrange flowers I needed vases.

KANEMOTO: When you buy one, you need another. How many vases did you own at one time?

NISHIMI: I don't think I ever counted them.

KANEMOTO: Maybe 100 or 200? You must have had many vases.

NISHIMI: Yes, on shelves for the students to use.

KANEMOTO: You must have a variety of vases.

NISHIMI: There is a style for certain time periods.

KANEMOTO: Oh. Must be for certain seasons and times. When the war started what were your thoughts?

NISHIMI: Oh, I thought this is really a difficult problem.

KANEMOTO: Did the FBI ask questions of Mr. Nishimi?

NISHIMI: There was no contact with the FBI.

KANEMOTO: Not at all?

NISHIMI: There were children. The others that were taken by the FBI had lots of problems. I felt sorry for them. I felt if it happened to me, it would have been terrible.

KANEMOTO: Which camp did you go to first?

NISHIMI: At first we went to Walerga. From there we went to Tule Lake.

KANEMOTO: Oh, I see.

NISHIMI: When we were there in Walerga, the camp was not completed. The toilet had no partition so everyone's buttocks was on the line, back to back.

KANEMOTO: Everyone must have been embarrassed.

NISHIMI: At 110 degrees in the sun, everyone carried a plate, and lined up to get their food.

KANEMOTO: You must have felt like a prisoner.

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: I see. Then all your children, especially little ones like Yoshiko went to school? Kiyoshi was already married. Yes.

KANEMOTO: Mrs. Nishimi, did you work in camp?

NISHIMI: At camp? Work?

KANEMOTO: Waitress or. . . .

NISHIMI: Yes. I helped as a waitress and dishwasher.

KANEMOTO: What was your pay? How much?

NISHIMI: Pay was sixteen dollars [per month].

KANEMOTO: With that money what did you buy? Was it enough?

NISHIMI: We got fed so we didn't need much. Didn't have to dress up. [laughing]

KANEMOTO: Oh. What kind of job did Mr. Nishimi have?

NISHIMI: Mess-hall manager.

KANEMOTO: Oh, mess-hall manager.

NISHIMI: He doesn't like to sit around. He built shelves, and arranged things on the shelves neatly.

KANEMOTO: He liked to arrange things, that was his business.

NISHIMI: Needed things were sorted. Then later when the inspector came, which was usually about noon at lunch time, we invited the inspector to have lunch in our mess-hall. He said this place is the cleanest mess-hall so I felt comfortable.

KANEMOTO: He did a good job of arranging and cleaning. Oh, I see, then did you stay until the camp closed?

NISHIMI: At Tule Lake.

KANEMOTO: When were you released from camp? What were your thoughts?

NISHIMI: When we left camp it was '45. We didn't have a house to live in so we had to look for a house. Then Mr. Nishimi's brother bought a billiard place.

KANEMOTO: Tamaba?

NISHIMI: Yeah, you poke a ball with a stick to play. At the store Mr. Maeda was the bookkeeper. We rented that place to him. Then we helped him run the place.

KANEMOTO: Then at that time, you already made up your mind not to go back to Los Angeles.

NISHIMI: Yes, if you don't have a house you cannot go back.

KANEMOTO: Didn't you keep the house in Los Angeles?

NISHIMI: The last house was near a junior high. Oil started to flow from that place.

KANEMOTO: Oil?

NISHIMI: Yes, so no more school.

KANEMOTO: So the house was in the same area?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: You didn't own the house? You were renting?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Then it was good you didn't own the house--no damage.

NISHIMI: We did own that house. We were buying rice from the landowner. We had to pay for the rice before we left the place to enter camp. This rice was the Arkansas rice brand "Smith". For the price of rice, we had to give up our house.

KANEMOTO: It is a remarkable story. Then Mr. Nishimi had a brother that was back here in Sacramento with you. Is he the younger brother?

NISHIMI: Yeah.

KANEMOTO: Did he come to Sacramento?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Anyway, in Los Angeles you taught Ohana (flower arrangement). Then you started flower arrangement before camp days?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Then you taught flower arrangement. At that time were you a teacher or a student?

NISHIMI: I was a teacher.

KANEMOTO: Oh, a teacher, then you had your credential.

NISHIMI: I had my credential before camp.

KANEMOTO: Between time did you go to Japan to get your diploma?

NISHIMI: Diploma was given to me through my teacher, but for my own experience I went to Japan.

KANEMOTO: How many times did you go?

NISHIMI: To Japan? I went three times.

KANEMOTO: Was it to Kyoto?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: You had quite a bit of expenses?

NISHIMI: Yes, it takes money but I went for my own education.

KANEMOTO: Mr. Nishimi urged you to go? Did he mind?

NISHIMI: No. He didn't mind so I had my way.

KANEMOTO: Oh, that was good. Some people would think it to be just a hobby. That was good. Then when you came back from camp to Sacramento was it '45?

NISHIMI: Uh huh.

KANEMOTO: All your children grew up here. Did you come to this house?

NISHIMI: Not here. The Nichiren Church (Buddhist) that was behind the art gallery.

KANEMOTO: Oh, I see. Art gallery, is it the museum?

NISHIMI: Yeah. Behind the museum there was a Nichiren church. We rented from the church. The place was old and rattled when someone walked above us.

When we rented the place there were many roaches.

Our nephew helped Nishimi clean up the place.
Chinese used to live there.

KANEMOTO: They used lots of oil, and it was smelly?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Was the rent low or high?

NISHIMI: It was cheap. The Lincoln Grammar School was there. So when our son, Don, was little he knew his mama did Ikebana, so when he was in the school yard he picked up some tree branches and said, " I got some material for your Ikebana."

KANEMOTO: Did you teach Ikebana in camp?

NISHIMI: In camp? Yes, I did teach a little about the basics.

KANEMOTO: Did you charge tuition?

NISHIMI: No tuition, I just taught some.

KANEMOTO: What did you use? There were no flowers.

NISHIMI: I used wild plants growing in that area. Igusa, (no mention in dictionary) futoi and any plants in that area. There were no flowers so I bought some colored paper and made some.

KANEMOTO: Oh, paper flowers.

NISHIMI: Then I used daikon [Japanese radish] and carrots. I got some nails from the carpenter and used

those materials and made kenzan [a frog for Ikebana flower arrangement].

KANEMOTO: All that trouble and you did it. How about containers?

NISHIMI: We used dishes.

KANEMOTO: Dishes were used instead of the vases? Were there anything else you did for a hobby? Sewing, knitting, crochet or oshiye [pressed picture, either material or paper on base paper]. Did you do anything else?

NISHIMI: At that time, I had a problem with my shoulder. I liked to knit and crochet but I couldn't do those things.

KANEMOTO: Oh, I see. All right. You just talked about kenzan (frog for flower arrangement) and really it is a good idea. Then you went back to Sacramento? Right after you got back to Sacramento did you feel any racial discrimination?

NISHIMI: There was no discrimination but about a block away there was a store. The store on the other side was a store was operated by a Japanese. Another one was operated by a Chinese. I heard someone went to this Chinese store and they refused to sell.

KANEMOTO: The Chinese refused?

NISHIMI: Yeah. No, it wasn't Chinese it was Filipino.

KANEMOTO: Filipino store didn't want to sell to Japanese?
Inconsiderate. Did you feel any other
discrimination?

NISHIMI: No, I didn't feel any.

KANEMOTO: Were your children being picked on?

NISHIMI: No. When a Chinese restaurant owner who was
staying nearby passed by our place and he saw my
daughter Sharon, was six years old, he called her
"saikoi", that means little girl. "Saikoi come",
he'd says to her.

KANEMOTO: Was it Japanese?

NISHIMI: No. It was Chinese.

KANEMOTO: Oh, it was in Chinese. Was she so little?

NISHIMI: Yeah! She was six years old.

KANEMOTO: Oh, but he liked her.

NISHIMI: That man died of stomach cancer later.

KANEMOTO: I see. So you moved away from behind that
museum?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Then it has been many years.

NISHIMI: At that time we received \$5,000. There was more
but they paid us \$5,000 at the time for loss of
property. Our claim was for \$20,000 so this

\$5,000 was for the partial damage. We used that \$5,000 as down payment for this house.

KANEMOTO: The first payment you got paid for what? Did someone borrow money?

NISHIMI: No, we sued for the damages we lost earlier.

KANEMOTO: Was it in Los Angeles?

NISHIMI: Yes. We sued for the loss of our house in Los Angeles for \$20,000. We got \$5,000 as partial payment.

KANEMOTO: Then that became your down payment?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: How long have you lived here?

NISHIMI: About forty years. Possibly fifty years.

KANEMOTO: Fifty years then.

NISHIMI: Yes. Fifty years. I was given a Fiftieth Anniversary so it could be even sixty years.

KANEMOTO: It's fifty years since you came back from camp. You lived here a long time.

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Have your neighbors changed?

NISHIMI: No, our neighbors didn't change.

KANEMOTO: Is that so. That's why you don't want to move.

NISHIMI: Everyone here owns their house.

KANEMOTO: That's the reason you don't have too much worry. You must be physically tired now.

NISHIMI: No.

KANEMOTO: You are not tired? In raising your four children what kind of ideas have you instilled in their minds? What important thoughts did you teach them for life?

NISHIMI: You don't have to be the most important person, but be a good citizen. Do not be a burden to others. That is all I told them.

KANEMOTO: That is great, very nice.

NISHIMI: My children did grow up to my expectation.

KANEMOTO: That is true. Because of the issei's teachings, niseis are proud of their upbringing and they don't have to be ashamed. When you went to camp, did you lose some of your personal properties?

NISHIMI: Yes. In our basement and garage. We repaired the garage, then our neighbors asked to store their properties too. Relatives also brought their properties. There was an Italian family about four or five houses away from us. We were friendly with this family. This person, through a friend of ours, said he would watch the house and asked to rent the house including the icebox and piano. That was a lie. We didn't sell the ice box and piano but left them for them for their use. We already had an offer to buy, but

we didn't because he had asked us. We left the icebox and radio for them to use. We rented it to them. Then when we were in camp, Dan was born.

KANEMOTO: Oh, Dan was born in camp?

NISHIMI: We needed the ice box to store milk, so I asked them to send us that ice box. They said they needed it, too.

KANEMOTO: Yeah?

NISHIMI: It was not theirs. They never sent it to us.

KANEMOTO: Is that so, we couldn't do that to others. Was that all there was to it?

NISHIMI: Yes, that was all there was to it. That was the last of it.

KANEMOTO: It doesn't seem real.

NISHIMI: Then the renters wrote and told us the stored furniture in the basement and garage were being stolen.

KANEMOTO: Were they Italian?

NISHIMI: That man promised to watch our property when he let his friends move into our house. He promised to protect them. That turned out to be a lie. After that . . .

[Tape 2, Side B]

KANEMOTO: So while you were in camp, the things you left in storage were stolen?

NISHIMI: Yes. They stole little by little like by rats. While in camp the government offered to put personal property in storage so we filed an application and applied for that. We had ten pound, sugar sacks, no, it was 100 pound sacks. When we came back those things were not there.

KANEMOTO: Were you keeping many of those sacks?

NISHIMI: We had a store so we kept what was left carefully wrapped.

KANEMOTO: Those packaged goods, did you get in Sacramento or in camp?

NISHIMI: While we were in camp. They announced that we were to move out of here so we asked if we could have our personal properties sent to camp.

KANEMOTO: Did you get it?

NISHIMI: No, nothing.

KANEMOTO: Nothing. Your piano and everything. Then all the clothing and those things were missing. Then you lost everything! They sure made off with your personal properties. All losses to you. Even if you are angry, you can't do anything. . .

.

- NISHIMI: Uh huh. They knew we couldn't come back so they would get away with anything.
- KANEMOTO: Oh, yes, they were not afraid. Yes, they were not afraid of the law.
- NISHIMI: No. That is why we bought rice from this wholesale boss all the time and trusted him. Even he acted like he was superior. Yeah. Even the wholesale boss was not honest with us.
- KANEMOTO: Human people do change. Even though we had all kinds of obstacles, Japanese were brought up to tolerate against these many problems (gaman) with perseverance.
- NISHIMI: That is true.
- KANEMOTO: We figured as long as we were alive. . . .
The isseis would like to leave the legacy for the niseis, sanseis and yonseis. What would you say? What is your advice to them? You understand what I mean? Isseis sure went through many hardships and sacrifices.
- NISHIMI: Patience and utmost effort. Utmost effort, never crying out, never going against the law or exaggerating and never showing signs of laziness.
- KANEMOTO: Okay. Let's talk more about your flowers again. In Sacramento, Mrs. Nishimi, you're known as the most highly respected Ikebana teacher.

NISHIMI: [Laughing] not yet.

KANEMOTO: Even now, are you teaching?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Do you still have to go to San Francisco?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: Does someone take you?

NISHIMI: The Japan headquarters (International Ikebana) sends a delegate and we must attend the conference.

KANEMOTO: Ahhh, I see. Who takes you to San Francisco?

NISHIMI: Sometimes I go with other students or other times I go with my daughter, Sharon. Sharon drives me there. Other times the grandchildren take me.

KANEMOTO: You are lucky. Your families pitch in and help grandma. You have no problems right now? You are getting Social Security.

NISHIMI: No hardship.

KANEMOTO: There is no hardship. Your family takes good care of you. Your grandchildren and your grown offsprings take care of you. Are they all living in Sacramento?

NISHIMI: There are two in the Los Angeles area. My first son and first daughter.

KANEMOTO: Oh, I see. Kiyoshi and Yoshiko?

NISHIMI: Yeah. the rest are in Sacramento.

KANEMOTO: I see. Then you are not lonely. Yasuko seems gentle and a very kind person.

NISHIMI: Yes, she takes good care of me.

KANEMOTO: Oh, yes, today she must have shopped for you.

NISHIMI: Yeah.

KANEMOTO: Do you go out?

NISHIMI: I make a list of things I need and then she buys them for me.

KANEMOTO: It will be faster that way instead of my going with her.

NISHIMI: If I go, she will have to take me and then come after me and take me back.

KANEMOTO: [Laugh] Yes. You are thoughtful and try not to inconvenience others. You are a considerate person. Mrs. Nishimi, your Japanese speech is very proper, classic, gentle and refined.

NISHIMI: [Laughing]

KANEMOTO: It is not coarse. Thank you, I enjoyed talking with you very much. My Japanese is not perfect but I was told I could speak better than most niseis.

NISHIMI: Yes. You are very good, no one could speak better than you.

KANEMOTO: Oh, thank you. Shall we close this now? Is there anything else you would like to say? To

your children and grandchildren? A copy of this tape will be given to them. Is there anything you would like to say to them?

NISHIMI: Let me think. If everyone will be kind and friendly with each other. . . . That is all I ask.

KANEMOTO: Thank you very much. You must be tired.

NISHIMI: [Laughing]

KANEMOTO: This is about your heart. It must be a pacemaker isn't it?

NISHIMI: Yes.

KANEMOTO: How many years did you have this pacemaker? Is it about four or five years?

NISHIMI: Yeah. Not four or five years but over ten years.

KANEMOTO: Oh, is that so, you had help from above. Are your legs weak?

NISHIMI: Yeah. The doctor told me that my heart is weak so the blood circulation is not good.

KANEMOTO: Is that so, then exercise will help.

NISHIMI: No, I can't. I have weak legs. My legs feel like needles were poking into them.

KANEMOTO: Oh, bad circulation in your legs.

NISHIMI: I massage my legs myself.

KANEMOTO: Oh, massage.

NISHIMI: Yeah. I massage myself with an abacus-like instrument but much larger.

KANEMOTO: Oh, it helps stimulate your circulation. Oh, I see. Is there any way you should visit Japan once more?

NISHIMI: When one of my children decides to go, I would like that person to take me along.

KANEMOTO: When Sharon went she had a good time didn't she? It will be nice to visit your ancestor's place. You will still feel at home and can say anything you like in Japanese.

NISHIMI: Uh huh.

KANEMOTO: Take care!

[End of Tape II, Side B]